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RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA IMMEDIATE 0974  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0264  
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2578  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 8142  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 8227  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1871  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0367  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0550  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKDIA/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 DHAKA 001797

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO DNI  
DEPT FOR SES-O  
DEPT FOR SCA/PB, SCA/EX  
DCHA/OFDA FOR ROBERT THAYER  
AID/W FOR AA MARK WARD AND ANE ANNE DIX  
DCHA/FFP FOR MATTHEW NIMS AND PAUL NOVICK  
ROME FOR FODAG  
BANGKOK FOR RDM/A TOM DOLAN, BOB BARTON  
KATHMANDU FOR USAID OFDA BILL BERGER AND SUE MCINTYRE  
TREASURY FOR ELIZABETH WEISS AND SUSAN CHUN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [AMGT](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#)

BG

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH CYCLONE SIDR SITREP FOR NOVEMBER 17

REF: A) STATE 157623 B) DHAKA 1796 C) DHAKA-WASHINGTON EMAIL SITREPS  
OF NOVEMBER 15-16, 2007

**¶1.** (SBU) SUMMARY: Bangladesh is slowly beginning to assess the damage caused by Cyclone Sidr. Unofficial estimates of the number of deaths reached 2,000 by late afternoon November 17. As many as a million homes and an estimated 250,000 acres of crops may have been damaged or destroyed. Loss of power has been a major problem throughout the country, but electricity in Dhaka largely has been restored. An early report of damage to rural electrical networks estimates that more than USD 20 million will be required to restore power outside main cities. Major disruptions to transportation and communications networks have hindered the ability to assess damage. The GOB is trying to assess and prioritize needs and respond to the many offers of assistance that are pouring in. At the request of Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, the Embassy is preparing a list of possible areas in which the USG could provide assistance. The Embassy has not received any requests for assistance from American citizens in Bangladesh. END SUMMARY.

LOSS OF LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD

**¶2.** (U) As of late afternoon local time November 17, the official death toll from Cyclone Sidr stood at 936, though unofficial reports indicated the toll was expected to climb past 2,000. According to the Bangladesh Ministry of Food and Disaster Management (MFDM), it will take another 2-3 days to get a better estimate of the extent of damage and number of casualties. While the loss of life appears to have been mitigated in part by strengthened disaster preparation

(NOTE: Cyclones in Bangladesh with a similar strength to Sidr left 500,000 and 100,000 dead in 1970 and 1991, respectively. END NOTE.), homes and livelihoods have been devastated. Districts in the southwest coastal region of Bangladesh were the hardest hit. Preliminary estimates indicate that as many as one million homes may have been destroyed and that 250,000 acres of land and crops have been damaged. There was also a significant loss of livestock, including fish and seafood, a major export for Bangladesh. As many as 3 million people were evacuated in advance of the cyclone, 670,000 of whom were accommodated in special cyclone shelters. Many people have now departed temporary shelters for their homes; approximately 240,000 are reported to remain in the cyclone shelters.

#### LOSS OF POWER

¶3. (SBU) Large sections of the country are without power. As the cyclone reached Bangladesh on November 15, the national power grid was brought down as a precaution. Getting the grid back online has been a major challenge. Dhaka, the capital city, was only able to get power restored city-wide late on November 16. Even then, anecdotal reports indicate that power remains an issue in Dhaka. (NOTE: Power outages in the diplomatic enclave have been minimal, and Embassy residences and offices have had no problems running on generator power when needed. END NOTE.) A lack of power at Zia International Airport in Dhaka meant that a helicopter returning from a cyclone assessment late on November 16 had to land without the aid of runway lights. Much of coastal Bangladesh remains without power. Rural electrification boards, which have received large-scale USG assistance in Bangladesh's 36-year history, report that more than USD 20 million will be required to restore power to these areas.

DHAKA 00001797 002 OF 004

#### GOB RESPONSE

¶4. (SBU) Significant damage to transportation and communication networks has slowed damage assessment by authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U. Ahmed traveled by helicopter November 16 to visit cyclone-affected areas. There are reports that their helicopter was mobbed by cyclone victims seeking relief supplies at one stop during the visit. The Bangladesh military is on the front lines of the current relief efforts. Emergency supplies are being distributed by air and land, albeit in a limited fashion. The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has allocated 95 million taka (about USD 1,376,811) for the 15 affected districts for use for rescue operations and 3,000 metric tons of rice for relief operations.

¶5. (U) The GOB is distributing dry food to most cyclone-affected districts and by helicopter to remote areas. By noon November 17, the GOB reported it had completed 12 airlifts of dry food. According to MFDM sources, there is an urgent need for ready-to-eat dry food. Ministry sources offered helicopter services to USAID implementing partners to facilitate distribution of relief assistance to inaccessible areas. Medical teams are providing medical care to the injured in the shelters. In total, 732 medical teams (including military) are working in the affected teams.

#### USG RESPONSE

¶6. (SBU) In a November 17 phone conversation with the Charg d'Affaires a.i., General Moeen welcomed her offer of USG aid, in particular her suggestion that a U.S. Army medical team already in-country stand by to provide assistance. Moeen said priority needs include food, drinking water, shelter materials, blankets, clothing and medicine. The Chief Adviser noted that food and water were needed most.

¶7. (SBU) In response to our query about what USG assistance could be useful, on November 17 the Chief Adviser requested the CDA a.i. supply him with a notional list of the kinds of assistance we could provide. The Embassy is preparing this list, which will be based on input from USAID and DoD elements at post, and coordinated with

OFDA. The Regional Adviser for the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) is expected to arrive in Dhaka late November 17. She will visit the cyclone-hit region and, in conjunction with the country team, pinpoint areas for USG assistance. USAID Dhaka is already beginning to process the USD 100,000 in disaster assistance granted by OFDA. (Ref A)

**¶18.** (U) USAID Implementing Partners Save the Children (Save) and CARE are working in nine affected districts, Barisal, Patuakhali, Bhola, Perozpur, Jhalokhati, Borguna, Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat.

Save is deploying two water treatment units to Bhola and Patuakhali districts that can process 1,500 liters of water per hour. It is planning to distribute emergency survival packages to 2,500 families and is also working with the World Food Program to distribute high energy biscuits to 88,000 families. Save is taking the lead coordination role for all NGOs operating in the Barisal region.

**¶19.** (U) CARE is working in close coordination with the GOB and NGOs in the Khulna region. On November 18, it will begin to distribute

DHAKA 00001797 003 OF 004

emergency survival packets to 13,000 families in remote areas of Bagerhat district. These packets include receive plastic sheeting, drinking water and other basic supplies. Five thousand of these 13,000 families will also receive dry food rations. CARE will deploy two water treatment units as well.

#### OTHER DONORS

**¶10.** (U) NGOs and diplomatic missions in Bangladesh are also making assessments and offering assistance. Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Chowdhury announced he expects the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to provide close to USD 6 million in cyclone aid. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has appealed for USD 3.5 million to assist Bangladesh. The European Union has pledged 1.5 million Euros. Canada has indicated it will donate at least 100,000 dollars. The United Nations has provided nutritional biscuits to feed 400,000 people for three days. BRAC, one of the largest NGOs in Bangladesh, has earmarked USD 1 million for cyclone relief and has appealed for contribution of at least USD 1 million more.

**¶11.** (U) The World Food Program (WFP) has seven assessment teams in affected areas. As part of its immediate response, WFP made available 98 metric tons of high energy biscuits, 18.75 metric tons of which have already been distributed to 25,000 families in two districts. Saudi Arabia has provided 7,000 tents. A meeting of the donor local consultative sub-group on Disaster Emergency Response has been scheduled for November 18.

#### PUBLIC OUTREACH

**¶12.** (U) USG press statements offering condolences and assistance were quoted in major Bangla-language newspapers November 17. Local and international media are starting to make inquiries to the Embassy about USG assistance, including reports that U.S. Navy ships are being dispatched to aid in relief efforts. We will continue to coordinate our public diplomacy efforts with Washington.

#### EMBASSY OPERATIONS

**¶13.** (SBU) Cyclone Sidr has had a minimal impact on Embassy operations. Backup generators at Mission offices and residences were in use while power was out in Dhaka, and the generators continue to be used as power fluctuates, which is occurring a somewhat higher rate than normal. Internet and television service, which had been disrupted, is largely restored. The Consular section has been in communication with American citizens throughout the country, but has not received any requests for assistance.

#### COMMENT

**¶14.** (SBU) Cyclone Sidr has exacted a heavier toll on livelihood than on life. While it is fortunate that loss of life appears to be less than previous cyclones in Bangladesh, millions of survivors face dire circumstances. In the short term, cyclone victims will

need food, water and shelter. In the long term, victims who already must struggle to support themselves face even greater economic hardship. The GOB appears to have responded well thus far to the crisis. It was active early to spread warnings and aid in evacuation. It is moving as quickly as possible to respond. The level of relief the GOB can provide is limited because its resources

DHAKA 00001797 004 OF 004

are limited. Donors will need to be mindful of placing additional strain on an already over-taxed government infrastructure.

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